UBCM 2006 Pre-Convention Session

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Check against delivery

Welcome to the UBCM. Who has been to a UBCM previously? Lots of repeat customers. And did you come looking for answers?
Well, hopefully in the course of the next four or five days you will find some of those answers from various levels of the provincial government, your colleagues and other governments – and you will help develop some answers for all of us.

I can't actually think of a more important gathering than the UBCM. I think we can all acknowledge the fact that there is but one tax-payer and our collective responsibility is to serve the tax-payer as effectively and efficiently as we can. So here on day one everyone is bright eyed and bushy tailed and ready to get to it. Let's hope some of that spirit still prevails by the time we get to Friday, after a series of meetings is over.

Is there anyone from Lytton here? I don't want to pick on the folks I have met, but they do have an interesting mechanism for insuring they get the meetings with provincial Ministers they want. I'm not even sure they want me to share it with you. Just let me say that if you share a cab with them, and they get off at their hotel first – they take all of the luggage in the cab with them. Then they hold all that luggage hostage until they set the time for a meeting in later in the week.

Thankfully, you have chosen to attend this session today, and I know all the sessions are important. But I cannot think of a more important time in our history to be gathered here, in the traditional territories of the Songhees and the Esquimalt First Nations in Victoria, to discuss and continue to chart our way through some very complex and challenging issues. You know, I cannot think of a time in our history when there has been cause to be as hopeful and optimistic.

When I came in, I saw at least one member of the BC Treaty Commission, a former colleague, my friend Jack Weisgerber. Jack, it's good to see you. Jack contributed his diagnosis and opinion to a report a few ago, making recommendations for improvement. I think it's fair to say we have seen good progress and we are standing on the cusp of perhaps achieving some great things.

It's been almost 15 years, folks, since the BC Treaty Commission was established in the early 1990's. The Commission has been doing its work ever since, and it would be incorrect to say that there was nothing to show for it. In fact there's been a great deal achieved. Nevertheless, it would be accurate to say that one of the primary objectives, the

conclusion of comprehensive treaty arrangements, is something that to this point has eluded us. That is, I say rather daringly, about to change.

I was in Ottawa last week, along with Deputy Lorne Brownsey and members of his staff. We reviewed some treaties, three of them in fact, and we are hopeful that we can now begin the formal ratification process in partnership with the First Nations involved and the federal government. Obviously, the process now involves passage by the First Nations themselves among their membership and passage of enabling legislation through both the provincial and federal parliaments.

We are hopeful that in the case of at least one of those treaties, that in a matter of weeks we will receive a signal from the federal government that they are prepared to proceed with the formal ratification process. It is no longer purely theoretical. It is, I hope, about to become a reality. Of course, that is in large measure a tribute to the work that has been done on the ground. It's work that some of you in this room have helped to do through the various representations involved in Treaty Advisory Committees. So, in a province where there are 120 First Nations involved at one stage or another in treaty discussion tables, we have a lot of work to do.

Your role in that work is as important as ever and perhaps more so now. In the days, weeks, and months ahead you will have an opportunity to examine, critique and provide feedback on some actual examples. It's hard work and it taxes your resources. That is something that the provincial government is acutely aware of.

There is a modest funding that has been made available and I acknowledge that it is modest. But today I'd like you to know that, as a response to some of the passionate and persistent submissions of the chair of the committee for UBCM, we're going to add another $100,000. We will provide that to the UBCM to distribute to assist the treaty advisory committee and consultation work. I hope you will view that as a recognition on the part of our government of the work you do, and that your involvement in this process is fundamentally important.

I would like to leave with you these thoughts as you embark upon discussions with some very learned, experienced and key personnel who have been intimately involved in the process. I want to emphasize that your discussion today is incredibly timely. It prefaces some historical developments that I am hopeful will be before the public of British Columbia and the public of Canada in a couple of weeks, depending on the timing.

But the last thought I hope you will be mindful of, because it guides the provincial government and I hope it will guide others – is that last year something occurred that in my view was very significant. It was when First Nations leadership came together and created the First Nations Leadership Council. It was unprecedented in the sense that it brought the leadership of three organizations, the First Nations Summit, the Union of B. C. Indian Chiefs, and the Assembly of First Nations together in a way that allows it to deal with the provincial government in a very coordinated way. That was largely instrumental and linked to another discussion that took place. Of course, that was the

creation or launch of the New Relationship that you have all heard about. It's hard to think about launching or creating a relationship, because a relationship is something one builds over time.

The New Relationship is based in large measure upon a single indisputable fact and that appears in the very first line of the document that summarizes the discussions. That line says the following – "we are all here to stay". That fact isn't going to change, thank God.

So how do we move forward together? The Province has set goals. We want to be the most educated society in North America, the healthiest society in North America, the society that practices the best environmental stewardship, the society that creates jobs and employment opportunities in a way that's unprecedented in North America. None of those goals for the Province are achievable unless we bridge the gap that for too long has separated First Nations from the socio-economic mainstream.

At a time when virtually everyone in this room represents communities grappling and dealing with a labour shortage, in some cases pending and in many cases a fact today - the fastest growing segment of our population has been historically shut out. Never, ever before in the history of our Province have we been confronted by a situation like we face today, where we need one another to succeed. So, we can recognize and capitalize upon the goodwill that has come to represent the New Relationship, when we move forward with discussion – whether it's at a treaty table, or at a table to discuss opportunities in other economic fields. If we can recognize the leadership that has courageously stepped forward from within First Nations communities to do things that have not taken place before, and I say somewhat immodestly, if we can recognize the leadership that the Premier has demonstrated in taking the Province where few thought it could or would go, – if we can capture that moment, if we can build on the success and find more success – then all of us are going to be better off.

So I wish you well in the deliberations that you will embark upon for the entire week. But I am somewhat biased in suggesting that by virtue of your choice to be at this session this afternoon, you are, in your own way, showing a vision of our province that will stand us all in good stead as we make that New Relationship a reality.

Thank you very much for allowing me to take a little bit of time to share those thoughts with you. I wish you well here this afternoon, and all best throughout the week. Thank you very much.